

StormWatch: Antibodies 3/?

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Category: Wildstorm Heroes

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-05-30 09:00:00

Updated: 2000-05-30 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 18:56:28

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 4,096

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Other parts of the Multiverse are affected by the infection in the Bleed

StormWatch: Antibodies 3/?

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All characters contained herein belong to either Image or

Wildstorm/DC. I am deriving no pecuniary benefit from the use of these characters. See previous chapters for full

disclaimers.

>

Additionally, this is my first attempt with these characters. A thousand pardons if I err in characterization or continuity, for I'm basing this chapter on three TPBs and one sole comic. As for any of the obvious continuity issues this chapter may provoke- well, the multiverse is a strange and wonderful thing, as we'll see more of later.

>

This story is rated PG-13 for language and references to violence and adult situations.

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StormWatch: Antibodies 3/??

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Somewhere, somewhen else:

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>

"Mmmmmmmmm, that was nice." Lauren Pennington sighed happily, savoring the delicious sensations coursing through her body. After several long moments, her toes slowly uncurled and she indulged herself in a skin-tinglingly luxuriant stretch.

>

"Mmmm hmmmm. Bloody *great*. Now sleep," the man beside her murmured. Face half-buried in a large pillow, his broad chest was already beginning to gently rise and fall with the first of what promised to be hours of prodigiously loud snores.

>

Lauren propped herself upon one elbow. She studied him a few moments, then lowered her lips to his ear and whispered in a wheedling tone. "C'mon, get up, Nigel..."

>

"Don't wanna," Nigel Keane protested sleepily, pulling a pillow over his head. "Lauren, please, I'm beggin' yeh. I'm an old man, I am, an' I need muh rest..."

>

One bouncy lock of curly red hair fell across her face, neatly dividing her vision. "Ni-gel, we can sleep when we're dead." She smiled brightly, and emerald eyes twinkled

mischewiously. "Let's do it again."

>

He sat up abruptly, and pale green limbs caught in tangled blue sheets. He threw the pillow aside, sputtering. "Again?

Are yeh tryin' to kill me, woman?"
>

She moved towards him, lips stained with the remnants of smeared lipstick curved upward in a wicked smile. "Don't *make* me get the cowboy hat..."
>

He paused for a moment, considering, then shifted his weight to his hip, moving atop her in one smooth fluid motion. Green hands gently pinned her wrists to the bed, and he grinned rakishly. "Well, when yeh put it like *that*..."
>

Delighted laughter was interrupted by a sharp staccato burst of radio noise. "Hellstrike. Fahrenheit. I need you both in the Analysis Deck, now."
>

"Ah, ballacks," Nigel groaned, neck lolling to nestle at the base of her throat. "Yer timing couldn't be better, Jackson. What the bloody hell do yeh want now?"
>

The other man took a deep breath, irked at the insolence in Hellstrike's tone. "*Want*? I *want* the medical staff to figure out a way to get those creatures out of Molly and the rest of the survivors so we can take them out of cryogenic lockdown without killing them and releasing the damn things. I *want* out of these damn politics. I *want* permanent U.N. financing for StormWatch." He paused, finishing rather sheepishly. "But I'll settle for the two of you joining the rest of the team in Conference Room Twelve as soon as possible."
>

Lauren frowned. "What's wrong, Jackson?" She sat up

straighter, though one painted toenail still absently trailed up and down the area of electrified forcefield that defined Nigel's calf 'muscle'. "Has Code Perfect been invoked?"

>

The Weatherman was silent a moment. "No, nothing like that."

>

The tone of his voice gave her pause. Lauren swallowed, playful mood vanishing. She reached for her cast-off silver

uniform, suddenly all business. "Are the aliens back?"

>

Beside her, Nigel stiffened. StormWatch regularly faced monsters and demons of all varieties without flinching, but there had been something spectacularly sinister about the creatures that had so recently ripped SkyWatch apart. He glanced furtively at Lauren and scowled. If he hadn't come in just in time to fry that thing trying to grab her face...

>

"NO!" Jackson assured them hurriedly. "No, nothing of the sort." His baritone voice deepened, as it often did when he was annoyed. "I'll explain when you get here. And I know it's asking a lot of the two of you, but please hurry the hell up. Winter, Flint and Fuji are already waiting on the Deck, most impatiently, might I add--"

>

Nigel cast one last longing look at the warm bed and the warmer woman, then regretfully rose to don his uniform, arm snaking out to grab a new beer as he did so. He glared in Jackson's general direction, and words came pouring out in a rush.

>

"Lissen here, wee lad, it weren't but two days ago them alien buggers yeh're talkin' about invaded our bleedin' *home*. In case yeh've forgotten, if Lauren, Nikolas an' I hadn't managed t' fry their overgrown cock-roach lookin' asses, we'd *all* be somebody's bloody breakfast right now, thank yeh very much. I think yeh can excuse us bein' a few friggin' minutes late."

>

Their leader said nothing, just sighed. No one could sigh quite like Jackson King. Low, deep, longsuffering, his exhalations were legendary in their exhortative power. They were also totally lost on Nigel Keane.

>

"What?!?" Nigel blurted. He sat down on the edge of the bed to slip on his boots. He tipped the bottle up and downed it in a few long gulps. "Yeh're tellin' me that we don't deserve just a little leeway after all the shit that's happened in the last few months?"

>

Jackson's wince was almost audible. "I know, Nigel. Believe me, I know- but we've still got a job to do. The U.N. doesn't care if we've had a bad day- they just want results."

>

Lauren, now fully clothed, climbed across the bed to embrace Nigel gently from behind, resting her cheek against his shoulder. He leaned into her. "Don't get your panties in a wad, Jackson. We're on our way."

>

"Good. Weatherman out." The link went silent.

>

Lauren made a face. She sat back in the bed, curling her

legs underneath her. "Wonder what that was all about?"
>

Nigel twisted on the edge of the bed to face her. "Don't know," he shrugged, tossing the now empty beer bottle on the floor to join a pile of its discarded brothers. "Guess we'll find out soon, though, won't we?"
>

"Guess so," she answered absently, trying to finger-comb unruly hair into place. "I hope it's nothing serious. I was looking forward to some down time."
>

"Really, now? I hadn't noticed." He teased, and was rewarded by her answering smile. He rose again, extending a hand to help her up. "Now come on, yeh wee temptress, before yeh make me ferget we've somewhere to be and get us both yelled at for bein' late again."
>

>

>

Victoria Ojuku reclined in a uncomfortable conference chair, dark eyes fixed on an overhead clock. She sighed, and crossed and uncrossed her legs impatiently under the table before leaning forward to rest her elbows against its polished surface. Chin cradled in one hand, she stared glumly through a large glass window at the bustling figures moving around the Analysis Deck.

The raised side conference room offered a wonderful view of the rest of the area. The Deck, and indeed the entire Orbital Platform, was full of people. Blue and black clad scientists swarmed around new equipment, testing, calibrating, ensuring that machinery replaced in the wake

of StormWatch's battle with the recent alien marauders was functioning properly.
>

"Those monsters tore this place apart," she murmured, fingers reflexively clenching at the memory of ripping them apart with her bare hands. One hand fluttered upwards and she gently touched her face.
>

After two days, it still hurt. The acid alien blood had splashed all over her face and chest, and while the scars were rapidly fading from her supposedly invulnerable skin the memory would linger for quite a while longer.
>

Apparently, she wasn't quite as invulnerable as everyone thought.
>

The huge mountain of metal seated across the table from her nodded sagely. "Ah, yes. Horrible creatures." His mechanized voice was soft and strangely sad.
>

Victoria looked up- way up- and studied the expressionless red mask of her teammate Fuji. She smiled, pearl white teeth gleaming against the darkness of her skin. "I don't know about you, Toshiro, but I'm ready to do *something*. All this inactivity is making me nervous."
>

He inclined his head politely. "I think I rather enjoy the quiet," his mechanized voice murmured softly. "This," he waved his huge hand gracefully, "Is very troublesome to me."
>

She tilted her head curiously. "What, new personnel?"
>

Misawa shook his head, settling carefully back into the

massive chair specially crafted for his use. It took up almost one entire side of the table. "No. . . the need for new personnel. I--" He broke off for a moment, then resumed in an even softer voice. "It pains me that we could not better protect Skywatch's crew. So many died in the attack. They were our responsibility, and we failed."

>

Her eyes closed for a moment, then she reached across the empty seat between them to briefly rest her hand on his. Her hand, large for a woman's, was dwarfed by his huge silver gauntlet. "Still, Toshiro- we did what we could. SkyWatch is still here because we were finally able to pull together and defeat them."

>

"I suppose you are right," Fuji murmured slowly, though Victoria still heard more than a trace of remorse in his synthesized voice. "Though my soul grieves for them, we must go on so that others will not share their fate."

>

"Very true, Toshiro," Another voice sounded behind them, and they spun in unison as their field leader Nikolas Kamarov entered the room, a steaming glass of tea in his hand. Hellstrike and Fahrenheit followed right behind him.

>

Victoria looked up and grinned. "Well, well. Look who the cat dragged in." She eyed her friend's disheveled hair and flushed skin and opened her mouth to make a comment, but thought better of it.

>

"Hey, Vicky," Lauren greeted her friend cheerily, walking around the table to take a seat beside her. "Has Jackson

shown up yet?"

>

"Not yet," Victoria shook her head. "But I gathered he wanted to talk to us about something pretty important."

>

Nigel took a seat beside her, turning his chair around to straddle it. "Aa, whatever it was, he needs to hurry up.

I've got better things to be doin' with me time." He leered at Lauren, who just rolled her eyes.

>

Nikolas took his seat at the far end of the table. He grimaced. "I'm not even going to ask. I'm *certain* we do not want to know."

>

Victoria nodded emphatically, and Toshiro's huge frame shook slightly, his genteel version of laughter. Nigel fixed a teasingly baleful glare at him. "Laugh it up, ol' son, and I'll get them geniuses out there," a green index finger pointed at the Analysis Deck, "To figure out some way to stablize the floors to eliminate all vibrations.

We'll see how yeh like *that*."

>

Toshiro straightened immedately, but his rumbling voice still held a hint of amusement. "Please do not do that, Nigel. I will be good."

>

Hellstrike nodded smugly and crossed his arms across the top of the chair. "Aa, that's what I thought."

>

Lauren elbowed him in the ribs. "Quit teasing Toshiro, Nigel. It's not nice."

>

Shaggy green eyebrows waggled in surprise. "HIM? *He's* the one that bloody well has an orgasm every five fraggin'

minutes! He's the luckiest bastard I've ever met! Why do
yeh all take up for him all the time?"
>

Victoria leaned over the table and smiled sweetly. "Because
he's not a human pig?"
>

Nigel drew himself up indignantly. "I'll have yeh know pigs
are fine animals. Very intelligent, pigs are."
>

"I have always thought so," Toshiro added loyally.
>

Biting back a comment of her own, Lauren instead scooted
her chair backwards, extricating herself from the
conversation. She rose quietly and walked over to the far
end of the table.
>

"Hey, Nikolas," she spoke softly so as not to disturb the
banter. "Can I have a minute?"
>

"Lauren," Winter inclined his head at his deputy leader.
"Do you have something on your mind?"
>

"You might say that," she nodded, crouching beside him. "Do
you have any idea what Jackson wanted with us today? I have
a weird feeling that there's more to this than he's letting
on."
>

He pursed his lips, and ice blue eyes narrowed
thoughtfully. "To be perfectly honest, I don't know. He
mentioned to me something to me earlier about 'clearing up
a mistake', but I have no idea what that meant."
>

Almost on cue, the Weatherman's distinctive footsteps
sounded, and he walked into the room. SkyWatch Executive
Officer Christine Trelane was right behind, bright blonde

hair a sharp counterpoint to the dark suits they both wore.
>

Hellstrike spotted them first and leaned forward excitedly.

"Ahah! Jackson, Christine! I need yeh to settle somethin' for us. We're havin' a bit of an argument, here-"
>

"First time for everything," Christine murmured dryly, then took her seat at Toshiro's right side.
>

Jackson's lips quirked in amusement, but he managed a gruff tone nonetheless. "This is an official meeting, Hellstrike.

Whatever it is can wait."

>

Fahrenheit and Winter exchanged a quick glance, then the former moved back to her place at the table. The rest of the team did likewise and the laughter faded as the team smoothly shifted into professional briefing mode.
>

Jackson took his seat at the head of the table. He took a deep breath, scanning the faces at the table. His eyes rested on Christine, and her chin ducked slightly, a brief nod of encouragement.
>

Jackson smiled faintly at her and began. "First of all, I want to commend all of you for your recent performance in saving Skywatch from the aliens. This was a prime display of just why the world needs StormWatch, and I'm proud of you all."
>

"We were just doing our job," Winter murmured quietly, an edge of some unidentifiable emotion in his voice.
>

"I know that," Jackson replied, and stood up to pace the

room, arms clasped behind his back. "And you did it well.

That's not why I've asked you here today."

>

"*Asked*?" Nigel muttered, sotto voce. Lauren scowled and kicked him under the table.

>

Jackson pretended not to notice. "You're here today because I'm considering a drastic course of action, and I want your imput before I make any final decisions." Feet spaced far apart as if expecting a blow, Jackson raised his chin and bluntly began.

>

"All this," he motioned to the technicians refurbishing the deck, "Was almost destroyed because of one single mistake. I was careless, and my actions almost cost us the station.

I don't want that happening again."

>

The others were quiet, barely daring to breathe. Nikolas was still a moment, bright head bent as he considered the other man's words. "What happened here is not your fault," he murmured quietly. "You know that."

>

Jackson's silver neural headset gleamed dully in the starlight. "That's where you're wrong, Winter," he corrected sharply. "As Weatherman, I'm responsible for *everything* that happens on this Station. That's why I called you here today."

>

"What is this all about, then, *Weatherman*?" Nikolas asked quietly, his accented voice emphasizing the title.

>

"Let me show you," the tall man sat back down, murmuring a sequence of commands into the metal headset cupping his

ear. A bright holographic display sprang out of the table.
>

The greenish image extended half the length of the table and several feet into the air. It showed a close up of a large viewscreen illuminated with flickering red light inside.
>

"That's one of Molly's viewing ports, isn't it?" Lauren looked up and the display casted undulating crimson hues on her fair skin. "A lens made of altered atoms that lets us see into other worlds."
>

Toshiro leaned down for a better view. "And that must be the Bleed. It is. . . beautiful."
>

Jackson just nodded. "It is. In light of what happened on the parallel world, we thought it might be a good idea to have the techs keep a close eye on everything we can see through it."
>

Nikolas' shoulders squared and he looked at Jackson, challenge in his eyes. Both men thought of their fierce argument regarding StormWatch's action- or inaction- to help that embattled world. "I take it something else has happened?"
>

Jackson's expression darkened, and Christine quickly answered for him. "Well, that's the question. We probably would never have noticed it if we hadn't had to replace so much equipment on the station, but in all the recalibrations somebody noticed an interesting anomaly."
>

"Please explain, Weatherman," Fuji intoned, hands resting lightly on his armored knees. "I am afraid I do not quite

understand."

>

Jackson looked haggard in the eerie red glow of the

holographic image. "The Bleed has changed."

>

"What?" Nigel pursed his lips, his detective's mind rapidly piecing together the scraps of information he'd gleaned

about the topic. "I thought the Bleed was a void separating

everything from everything else. Ain't it supposed to be a

bloody *constant*, or somethin'?"

>

"We *thought* so," Jackson answered slowly, crossing his

arms over his chest. "All the evidence to date would seem

to indicate that, yes."

>

"What does this *mean*?" Lauren demanded, face turned

upward towards the hypnotic flickers of light on the

viewscreen.

>

"It means," Nikolas' voice grew louder as he became more

agitated. "That we may be in great danger. If there are

fluctuations in the Bleed, it is very possible that all

worlds- ours included- may be affected."

>

Jackson nodded bleakly. "That's it, exactly. It's odd- none

of the Earth 'scopes are turning up *anything*, but I've

got three teams analyzing data from the Skywatch lens now.

There's been no damage so far, but some of the data they're

predicting- " He visibly repressed a shudder. "Catastrophic

doesn't begin to cover it."

>

Victoria twisted in her chair to face the Weatherman, elegant features creased in concern. "What can we do about this, Jackson?"
>

The dark man drew himself up to his full height and looked directly at Nikolas. "StormWatch was formed to save lives. If there's a possibility that we can do something about it, we should."
>

The former Spetznaz officer stared the other man for a long moment, then his expression softened. "The Weatherman is correct." This time there was no hint of mockery in the tone. "We must do something."
>

"Agreed, but what?" Fahrenheit looked at both men in turn. "You've got to admit, this isn't exactly our standard scenario, if there is any such thing. You didn't answer Vicky's question, Weatherman. What can we do about something like this?"
>

Jackson met her direct gaze. "Not so long ago Winter suggested crossing the Bleed to give aid to Jack Hawksmoor's StormWatch. We—" He caught himself. "*I* decided that was too dangerous, too risky." He looked down, then up again. "It was a mistake. People died because I wasn't willing to take that risk."
>

"Jackson," Christine extended a slender hand toward him, but he cut her off abruptly.
>

"No, let me finish." He looked up and down the table. "Like I said, StormWatch was formed to save lives. If that means taking risks, so be it." His eyes fixed on Fahrenheit.

"Lauren, you were right. This *isn't* the kind of mission

StormWatch was formed for, the kind of thing you're even
remotely prepared to do." He turned to address them all.

"But there's nobody else to do the job."

>

One hand fell flat against the table. "I may be premature
in this. The fluctuation may be harmless- hell, for all we
know at this point it may be normal for the Bleed."

>

"I'm gettin' thirsty, Jackson, get to th' point," Nigel
interrupted urgently.

>

Jackson pursed his lips wryly. "All right. I called you all
together today for this. If something *is* wrong with the
Bleed and we can't solve it from here, I'm considering the
possibility of sending some or all of you into it, and I
don't know what the consequences of something like that
would be."

>

There was a long pause while the members of the team
collected their respective thoughts.

>

"Is that all?" Nigel asked suspiciously, putting aside
natural feelings of trepidation. "Yeh might be sending us
somewhere we might not come back from? Since when is that
something new? This job ain't exactly sellin' insurance,

Weatherman."

>

Nikolas beamed, pleased with the decision. "We will go
wherever the need is, Weatherman. If you think that is in
the Bleed, then that is where we'll go."

"Don't take this lightly," The Weatherman warned, both hands now pressed flat against the table. "I'm telling you now. This won't be like any other mission you've ever been on. If any of you decide not to accept it, I won't hold it against you."

>

Lauren paused, then made her decision. "You said it before,

Jackson. This job is about saving lives. If we can do that on a grand scale- well, then, all the better." She rose from her chair, resting her hands lightly along its back.

>

Victoria followed suit, dark eyes full of meaning. "I'm in."

>

Fuji rose out of his chair and bowed slightly. "It would be the greatest honor of my life to do this thing you ask."

>

Jackson studied them carefully. "You're all sure about this?"

>

Nigel rose, yawning. "Sure, we're sure. Now is that all?

Are we done here?"

>

Jackson looked at Christine, who just chuckled. "I suppose so," he snorted, a bit bewildered. "You can go."

>

Nikolas rose last of all and walked over to the Weatherman. He didn't say a word, only rested his hand briefly on the other man's shoulder approvingly before moving towards the doorway.

>

His teammates followed one by one, murmuring amongst themselves as they left.

"Aa, all this talking's made me thirsty. Anyone want to hit

the pubs tonight?"

>

"Breathing makes you thirsty, Nigel."

>

"That ain't all that makes me thirsty, lass."

>

"Ni-gel..."

>

"What about you, Nick? How does Clark's sound tonight?"

>

"That is an excellent idea, old friend."

>

"Although I cannot imbibe, I too would enjoy the
camaraderie of joining you at your drinking establishment."

>

"Glad t' hear it, Toshiro. Maybe yeh an' me can beat up
some young punks just for good measure."

>

"Hey, Lauren, while they're doing that how about you and I
swing by a few clubs and maybe pick up a few guys for old
times sake?"

>

"I don't fraggin' *think* so, Ojuku-"

>

>

Their voices faded away and Jackson King, Weatherman,
watched them go. Christine walked behind him, resting her
hands on his shoulders. She slowly began to knead the
bunched muscles.

>

"Well, well. That went a hell of a lot better than you
thought it would." She grinned. "I'm not the kind to say 'I
told you so' -"

>

"Yes, you are," He murmured, grunting as her fingers found
a particularly sore spot.

>

"Maybe I am, at that," she smiled softly. "Jackson, what did you expect? You're a good Weatherman- more importantly, you're a good *man*. I know that, and they know it, too." She leaned forward, and strands of blonde hair tickled his cheek. "They trust you, even if you're having trouble trusting yourself right now."

>

"Maybe they do, at that," he allowed himself a small smile, and reached back to take her in his arms. Laughing, she took him by the hand instead and led him out of the dark room into the bustle of the Analysis Deck.

>

>

Alone in the dark room, the holographic display of the Bleed flickered crimson long into the night.

>

>

=====

>

-DuAnn

>

>

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives, give I unto you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

-John 14:27

End
file.